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CASE By... Emile Gaboriau

"You can't swear to that, because no one is sure of the real face of M. Lecoq. It is one thing today and another tomorrow. Sometimes he is a dark man, sometimes a fair one, sometimes quite young and then a centenarian. Why, often he deceives even me. I begin to talk to a stranger—presto! It is M. Lecoq! Anybody on the face of the earth might be he. If I were told that you were he, I should say, 'It is possible.' He can convert himself into any shape and form he chooses."

The guard would have continued forever his praises of M. Lecoq had not the sight of the judge's door put an end to them. This time Prosper was not kept waiting on the wooden bench. The judge, on the contrary, was waiting for him. His surprise was great to see the cashier's bearing—calm, without obstinacy, firm and assured without defiance.

"Well," he said, "have you reflected?"

"Not being guilty, monsieur, I had nothing to reflect upon."

"Ah, the prison has not been a good counselor. You forget that sincerity and repentance are the first things necessary to obtain the indulgence of a judge. Will you be good enough to tell me," he added, "how much you have spent during the last year?"

Prosper did not find it necessary to stop to reflect and calculate.

"Yes, monsieur," he answered unhesitatingly. "Circumstances made it necessary for me to preserve the greatest order in my extravagance. I spent about 50,000 francs."

"Where did you get it?"

"In the first place, 12,000 francs was left to me by my mother. I received from M. Fauvel 14,000 francs as my salary and share of the profits. At the Stock Exchange I gained 8,000 francs. The rest I borrowed and intend repaying out of the 15,000 francs which I have with M. Fauvel."

"Who lent you the money?"

"M. Raoul de Lagors."

This witness had left Paris the day of the robbery and could not be found. For the time being M. Patrigent was compelled to rely upon Prosper's word.

"Well," he said, "I will not press this point. But tell me why, in spite of the formal order of M. Fauvel, you drew the money from the Bank of France the night before instead of waiting till the morning of the payment."

"Because M. de Clameran had told me that it would be agreeable, even necessary, for him to have his money early in the morning. He will testify to that fact if you ask him. I knew that I will reach my office late."

"This M. de Clameran is a friend of yours?"

"By no means. I have always felt a sort of repulsion for him, but he is the intimate friend of my friend, M. Lagors."

"One more thing," said the judge. "How did you spend the evening, the night of the crime?"

"When I left my office, at 5 o'clock, I took the St. Germain train and went to Vesinet, M. de Lagors' country seat. I carried him 1,500 francs, which he had asked for, and not finding him at home, I left it with his servant."

"Did he tell you that M. de La... was going on a journey?"

"No, monsieur. I did not know that he had left Paris."

"Very well. Where did you go when you left Vesinet?"

"I returned to Paris and dined at a restaurant on the boulevard with a friend."

"And then?"

Prosper hesitated.

"You are silent," said M. Patrigent. "Then I will tell you how you employed your time. You returned to your rooms in Chaptal street, dressed yourself and attended a dance."

"You are right, monsieur."

"And did you not play at baccarat and lose 1,800 francs?"

"Pardon me, monsieur; only 1,100."

"Very well. In the morning you paid a note of a thousand francs?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Moreover, there remained 500 francs in your desk, and you had 400 in your purse when you were arrested. So that altogether in twenty-four hours 4,500 francs—"

Prosper was not disconcerted, but stupefied.

Not being aware of the powerful means of investigation possessed by the law, he wondered how in so short a time the judge could have obtained such accurate information.

"Your statement is correct, monsieur," he said finally.

"Where did all this money come from? The evening before you had so little that you were obliged to defer the payment of a small bill."

"Monsieur, the day of which you speak I sold through an agent some bonds I had, about 3,000 francs. Besides, I took from the safe 2,000 francs in advance on my salary. I have nothing to hide."

The prisoner had given clear answers. M. Patrigent determined to attack him from a new point.

"You say you have no wish to conceal any of your actions. Then why did you write this note to one of your companions?"

This time the blow told. Prosper's eyes dropped before the inquiring look

of the judge.

"I thought," he stammered—"I wished—"

"You wished to screen this woman?"

"Yes, monsieur, that is true. I knew that when a man in my condition is accused of robbery he has every fault, every weakness, of his life charged against him."

"I suppose you know who this woman is?"

"Mme. Gipsy was a governess when I first knew her. She was born at Oporto and came to France with a Portuguese family."

"Her name is not Gipsy. She has never been a governess, and she is not a Portuguese."

Prosper was about to protest, but M. Patrigent imposed silence. He shrugged his shoulders and began looking over a large file of papers on his desk.

"Ah, here it is," he said. "Listen! Palmyre Chocoreille, born at Paris in 1840, daughter of Chocoreille (James), undertaker's assistant, and of Caroline Piedent, his wife."

The prisoner made a gesture of impatience. He did not know that the judge was reading him this report to convince him that nothing can escape the police.

"Palmyre Chocoreille," he continued, "at twelve years of age was apprenticed to a shoemaker and remained with him until she was sixteen. Traces of her are lost for one year. At seventeen she is hired as a servant by a grocer on St. Denis street named Dom

bas and remains there three months. She passed this same year, 1857, at eight or ten different places. In 1858 she entered as a shopgirl the store of a fan merchant in Choiseul alley."

While he read the judge watched Prosper's face to observe the effect of these revelations.

"Toward the close of 1858," he continued, "the girl Chocoreille was employed as a servant by Mme. Munes and accompanied her to Lisbon. How long did she remain in Lisbon? What did she do while she remained there? We have no information as to this. However, it is certain that in 1861 she returned to Paris and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for an assault. Ah, she returned from Portugal with the name of Nina Gipsy."

"But I assure you, monsieur," Prosper began—"I assure you—"

"Yes, I comprehend. This history is less romantic doubtless than the one you have understood, but, then, it has the merit of being true. We lost sight of Palmyre Chocoreille, called Gipsy, upon her release from prison, but we meet her again six months later, having made the acquaintance of a traveling agent who became infatuated with her beauty. She deserted him to devote herself to you."

The judge paused for a moment, as if to give Prosper time for reflection, and then slowly said:

"And this is the woman whom you have made your companion, the woman for whom you have committed robbery."

Once more M. Patrigent was on the wrong track owing to Fanferlot's incomplete information. Prosper remained silent.

"At any rate," insisted M. Patrigent, "you will confess that this girl has ruined your ruin."

"I do not confess that, monsieur, for it is not true."

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"You will also say that it was not for this girl's sake you renounced an intimacy of many years and ceased spending your evenings at your employer's."

"I swear that she was not the cause."

"Then why did you cease suddenly your visits to the house of a young lady whom you confidently expected to marry? You had written to your father to demand her hand for you."

"I had reasons which I cannot reveal," answered Prosper in a trembling voice.

The judge breathed freely. At last he had discovered a vulnerable point in the prisoner's armor.

"Did Mlle. Madeleine dismiss you?"

Prosper was silent. He was visibly agitated.

"Speak," said M. Patrigent. "I warn you that this circumstance is one of the most important in your case."

"Whatever be the cost, I am compelled to keep silence."

"Beware of what you do. Justice will not be satisfied with scruples of conscience."

M. Patrigent waited for an answer. No answer came. Prosper was buried in thought.

"Monsieur," he finally said, "there is one detail I have forgotten to mention. It may be of importance in my defense."

"Explain."

"The messenger I sent to the bank was with me when I put the bills in the safe. At any rate, I left the office before he did."

"Very well. He shall be examined. Now you can return to your cell."

M. Patrigent thus abruptly dismissed Prosper because he wished to immediately act upon this last piece of information.

"Signault," said he to his secretary as soon as Prosper had left the room, "is not this Antonin the man who was excused from testifying because he sent a doctor's certificate declaring him too ill to appear?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Where does he live?"

"He is not at his home. Fanferlot says he was so ill that he was taken to the hospital—the Dubois hospital."

"Very well. I am going to examine him today—this very hour. Take writing materials and send for a carriage."

Would Antonin be able to answer? It was doubtful. The director of the hospital said that, although the man suffered horribly from a broken knee, his mind was perfectly clear.

"That being the case, monsieur," said the judge, "I wish to examine him and desire that no one be admitted while he makes his deposition."

"Oh, no one will disturb you, monsieur. His room contains four beds, but they are just now unoccupied."

"Very well. Come on."

When Antonin saw the judge enter, followed by a little lean man with the portfolio of an advocate, he at once knew that they had come to take his deposition.

"Ah," he said, "monsieur comes to see me about M. Bertomy's case?"

"Precisely."

In answer to the usual questions the messenger swore that he was named Antonin Poche, was forty years old, born at Cadaujac (Gironde), and was unmarried.

"Now," said the judge, "are you well enough to clearly answer any questions I may put?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Did you on the 27th of February go to the Bank of France for the 350,000 francs that were stolen?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"At what hour did you return?"

"Five o'clock."

"Do you remember what M. Bertomy did when you handed him the money? Now, do not be in a hurry; think before you answer."

"Let me see. First he counted the notes and made four packages of them, which he put in the safe. Then, it seems to me, he locked the safe and—yes, I am not mistaken—he went out."

He uttered these last words so quickly that, forgetting his knee, he half started up, but with a cry of pain.

"Are you sure of what you say?" asked the judge.

M. Patrigent's solemn tone seemed to frighten Antonin.

"Sure?" he replied, with marked hesitation. "I would bet my head on it. Still I am not sure!"

It was impossible for him to be more decided in his deposition. He had been frightened. He already imagined himself in difficulty, and for a trifle he would have retracted everything.

But the effect was already produced, and when they retired M. Patrigent said to Signault:

"This is very important—very important!"

To Be Continued.

A FLOATING THEATRE

"Perhaps the most interesting of new vessels plying the Ohio, Illinois and Mississippi rivers, is the one built upon an extensive scale for use as a floating theatre," says Frank McClure, in the Scientific American. "The seating capacity is for a thousand people, and there are boxes for the elite, and a pit for the orchestra. In addition, the vessel is sufficiently large to admit of numerous sleeping rooms for the actors, the deckhands, and all those connected with either the show or the boat. The entire force numbers 40. On the steamer which tows the floating theatre, besides the boilers and engines, there is a complete electric light plant, besides a kitchen and dining room."

In view of the fact that the long water route of the floating theatre carries it into the warmer portions of the South, the season for the show does not close until late in the southern winter. The entire route comprises 2,500 miles. The boat starts at Pittsburgh, and visits the towns of the coal miners and the steel workers

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along the Monongahela river. Next it returns and goes down the Ohio to the Kanawha, thence to Cairo, and later up the Illinois river to La Salle. Then, after going back to the Mississippi, the boat slowly makes its way in the direction of New Orleans.

The idea of the floating theatre is not exactly new, but the extensive scale upon which it is being conducted and the fact that it is the drama instead of the vaudeville program that is being presented, attract unusual attention. Faust is the production which has been presented this season.

"Along the route of the floating theatre the towns are often but ten or fifteen miles apart. Therefore the jumps of the boat and its company are not long ones. On the upper deck of the steamer is a calliope. Long before the theatre reaches the town in which it is to show, the sounds of this instrument may be heard. The idle population of the river towns at once begins to assemble on the wharf. As the steamer comes within a few hundred feet of the dock, the calliope is silenced and a brass band strikes up a familiar air. The crowd on the wharf then grows larger. Many are there awaiting to secure reserved seats. When the boat touches the wharf, the sailors, some of whom are later transformed into actors, make the vessel fast and put the gangplank in place. The scenery is arranged and the orchestra rehearses while the cook is preparing the next meal in the kitchen. The people come aboard and select their seats. Instead of doing so from a diagram on shore. At night the theatre is brilliantly lighted with electricity, and the

searchlight flashes over the surrounding territory. The entertainment lasts about three hours."

QUEER ORUULTY CASES

Many original crimes are brought to light in the annual report of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which was issued yesterday at Philadelphia.

Here are a few illustrative cases: Rejected by the woman he loved, a boy stabbed her parrot and pinned his card on the bird's cage. He was fined \$10 and costs.

Because his dog dug up a flower bed, a heartless master threw it under two freight trains, and each time the animal escaped with slight injuries. Then the man engaged two boys to throw it under trains until its injuries would cause death. He was mobbed by a number of women and spent 20 days in jail.

A revengeful Chinaman poured scalding water on a dog that soiled a pile of shirts, and chuckled as he watched the animal's skin peel off. He was fined \$10 and costs.

Offended by the language of a profane parrot, which insulted him in front of a bird store, a 10-year-old boy stabbed the bird in the breast. He was fined \$12.50 and costs.

A dog stole a pork chop, and, as the animal leaped from the counter a butcher impaled it on a carving knife. He was fined \$10 and costs.

Last year 18,933 cases were investigated by the society. There were 353 prosecutions and 6,990 cases were remedied without prosecution.—Philadelphia North American.



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